

## Bessie Fenn: Palm Beach's First Female Golf Pro

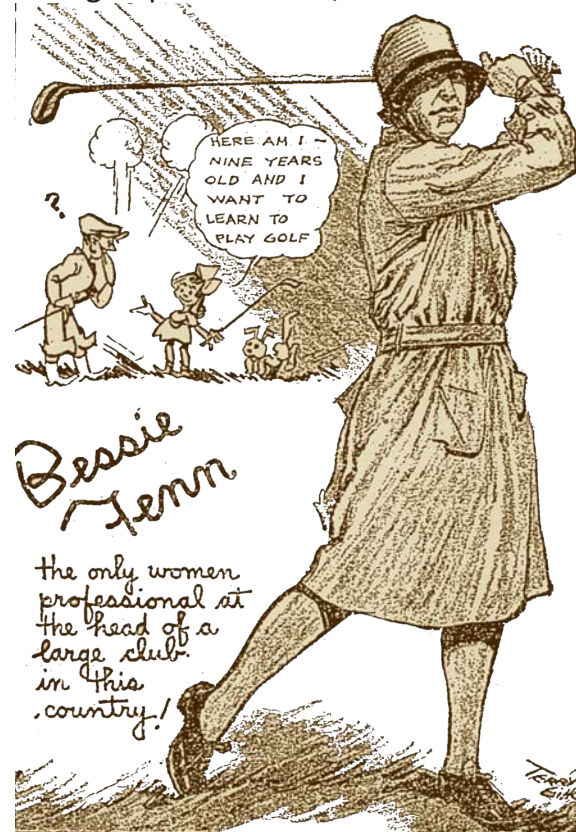
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**Golf arrived in Palm Beach** when the Royal Poinciana Hotel opened the first golf course in 1897, and the popular sport spread quickly, as did the need for instructors. One of the first American-born golf professionals, Arthur Harris Fenn (1857-1925), was the pro at the Palm Beach Golf Club during

the winter season for twenty-seven years; during the summer he served as the golf pro in Poland Springs, Maine. When he died in 1925, his daughter, professional golfer Bessie Fenn (1889-1963) assumed the reins as golf pro-manager at the Palm Beach Golf Club, a position she held for over 34 years.

Arthur Fenn taught seven-year-old Bessie to play golf, although she never meant to turn it into a career. Bessie worked as a nurse during World War I, but later turned to golf as a profession. Over the years, she won the Palm Beach Championship twice, the Florida championship, the championship of Maine, and competed at the national level. When her father died, she applied for his vacant position and was chosen over 400 other applicants, thus becoming the first woman to manage a major country club golf course in the United States.

During her tenure, Bessie ran the course with an iron fist. At one time she rebuked the Duke of Windsor, "I'm sorry, you'll have to change your shoes in the men's locker room. That's our rule." The duke followed Bessie's orders. In honor of her time as golf pro and manager, the Woman's Golf Association of the Palm Beach Golf Club established the Bessie Fenn Tournament that used to be held in March. In 1993 her father was inducted into the Maine Golf Hall of Fame, an honor also bestowed on



Drawing of Bessie Fenn from *The Daily Illini* (University of Illinois), December 31, 1927.

Bessie in 2010. At the time of her retirement in 1959, the Fenns had managed the Palm Beach Golf Club for a combined total of 61 years.

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